

Spain's Podemos backs Brazilian PT's accommodation to far right coup plotters

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Millions of people worldwide are shocked and alarmed by the January 8 coup attempt in Brasilia by fascistic supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro. Nearly 5,000 demonstrators stormed the main buildings of the Brazilian federal government, demanding “intervention by the Armed Forces.” This is in a country where the military seized power in 1964 and ruled through a bloody dictatorship for two decades.

As Brazil's newly-elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) admitted, what unfolded was a coup attempt by forces linked to high-ranking figures in the military and the state, including Lula's own defence minister, José Múcio Monteiro Filho. Though he acknowledged that Múcio had advised him to abdicate power to the generals, Lula has insisted that he remain in office, as the PT tries to build a political bridge to the coup plotters.

Coming two years after Trump's fascistic coup attempt on January 6, 2021 in Washington, the fascistic coup attempt in Brasilia and the PT's craven response are exposing the bankruptcy of pseudo-left organizations internationally, including Spain's “left populist” Podemos party.

Podemos is backing the PT's accommodation to the far-right coup plotters in Brazil, doubling down on its own record of covering for similar coup plotters in Spain. This is the content of the “Six Theses on the Coup and the Far Right” by former Podemos leader and deputy prime minister of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government in Spain, Pablo Iglesias, in the online magazine CTXT.

Iglesias writes: “The ultra-right coup is today the greatest threat against liberal democracy. Some of us have been saying this for a long time.” To support this assertion, Iglesias recalls that in November 2020, he travelled to Bolivia after a US-EU-backed coup in that country, to “promote a declaration (the Declaration of La Paz) that pointed to the extreme right as the greatest threat to democracy in America and Europe.”

Iglesias' warning on far-right coup plotters is disingenuous. How, after the experience of fascist rule in Europe and bloody military dictatorships across Latin America in the 20th century, has the far right recovered such influence? If a few thousand far-right demonstrators threatened to seize power in Brasilia and Washington, it is that they enjoy support in the capitalist police state, while pseudo-left parties like Podemos work to block a mobilization of the working class against this danger.

The “liberal democratic” capitalist order Iglesias defends is

rotting on its feet. Decades of social austerity and multi-trillion bank bailouts since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union have produced levels of inequality incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Under Podemos, Spain's Ibox stock market index, like other stock markets across Europe, is recording record profits as inflation impoverishes workers and the number of deaths from COVID-19 reaches 160,000 in Spain and 2 million across Europe.

Podemos not only led the disbursing of massive EU bailout funds to corporations and banks, but joined the US-NATO war drive against Russia, arming Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. The PSOE-Podemos government set up mass detention camps where refugees crossing the Mediterranean are subjected to beatings, sexual assault and indefinite detention. With Podemos implementing such policies, which previously would have been unthinkable except under far-right regimes, the Spanish bourgeoisie was able to legitimise far-right parties like Vox. Thrusting this record aside, Iglesias writes:

The process of far-right radicalisation of the right wing is a reality in many Latin American countries, in the United States and also in many European countries. In the Spanish case, the emergence of Podemos and the rise of the Catalan independence movement provoked a reactionary radicalization of the right that, seeing the power structure of the 1978 system threatened, unabashedly defends order against the results of elections.

Podemos and its promotion of Spanish nationalism has not provoked, but facilitated and provided political cover for the “far-right radicalisation of the right wing.” Forty-five years after the Spanish ruling elite replaced the Francoite regime that emerged from the fascist victory in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War with a parliamentary democratic regime in 1978, coup plots and the legitimisation of Francisco Franco's dictatorship are unfolding under a Podemos government.

Iglesias postures as a critic of the “1978 system” set up by the Francoites, the PSOE and the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), but he is continuing the central feature of the PCE's Stalinist policy. Even in the face of the danger of fascistic military rule, it is resolutely hostile to a revolutionary political mobilisation

of the working class.

In 2020, after mass strikes in Spain against official inaction in the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of high-ranking former officers wrote to Spanish King Felipe VI, appealing for him to launch a coup. Top officers linked to Vox called to shoot “26 million” people as in Franco’s 1936 coup. Iglesias was sent out to downplay the scandal in a prime-time TV interview, where he declared: “What these gentlemen say, at their age and already retired, in a chat with a few too many drinks, does not pose any threat.”

Iglesias’s lies were exposed weeks later, as videos emerged of Spanish soldiers singing neo-Nazi songs and making fascist salutes. Soon after, WhatsApp chats revealed active-duty officers supporting the retired far-right generals’ appeals to kill 26 million people. Podemos then appealed for the army to investigate its own fascist sympathies. Unsurprisingly, the PSOE-Podemos government’s Ministry of Defence refused to disclose the results of this bogus investigation.

Iglesias attempts to cover his record, writing: “Fascism must be fought with the penal code and must be repressed. ... The defence of democracy is, above all, an ideological combat for which ideological and cultural devices are essential. Among them, the most important are media devices. If the democrats do not rearm with media instruments, anti-fascism will be defeated.”

Iglesias’s call to build up the repressive powers of the capitalist state is reactionary. His government’s record shows that these powers target not the far right, but working class opposition to Podemos. Podemos has dispatched heavily-armed police units last year to attack strikes such as the nationwide truckers’ strike, sending armoured vehicles to attack striking steelworkers in Cadiz.

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As NATO deepens its policy of world war with Russia, and far-right parties and coup attempts spread internationally, the lessons of the rise of fascism in the 1930s must be learned. Stopping imperialist war and the drive to far-right rule is not an “ideological” issue to be fought out by obtaining posts in the capitalist media. It requires mobilising the working class, independently of establishment parties and national trade union bureaucracies, in a struggle for socialism.

The basis to mobilise the working class against the threat of far-right military rule is the International Committee of the Fourth International’s (ICFI) defence of Trotskyism against the pseudo left. The policy of Iglesias is not an error, but the product of his defence of the material interests of affluent, pro-imperialist layers of the middle class. This orientation is embedded in the DNA of Podemos, founded in 2014 as a coalition of Stalinist professors like Iglesias with *Anticapitalistas*, the Spanish ally of France’s Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA).

The Pabloites, whose political ancestors rejected Trotskyism and split with the ICFI 70 years ago, in 1953, argued that the Stalinists and bourgeois nationalists would serve as revolutionary leaders of the working class for an entire historic epoch. On this basis, they accommodated to the parliamentary regime set up by the Francoites and the Stalinists in Spain in 1978. The record of the PSOE-Podemos government, decades later, is a poisoned fruit of

this anti-worker outlook.

Fighting far-right coup plotters requires building a Trotskyist vanguard in the working class to shatter the diktat over workers struggles exercised by national union bureaucracies like Brazil’s PT-linked United Workers Federation (CUT) and Spain’s Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO).

The lessons Trotsky drew from how Franco prepared the 1936 coup under Spain’s Popular Front government of Stalinists, social-democrats, and bourgeois liberals are of burning relevance to workers seeking to oppose petty-bourgeois political descendants of Popular Frontism like Iglesias. As the Spanish Civil War began, Trotsky wrote:

The danger lies not in the military braggarts and demagogues who openly appear as fascist; incomparably more menacing is the fact that at the approach of the proletarian revolution the officers’ corps becomes the executioner of the proletariat. ... It is necessary to replace the troops in the barracks commanded by the officers’ caste with the people’s militia, that is, with the democratic organization of the armed workers and peasants. There is no other solution. But such an army is incompatible with the domination of exploiters big and small. Can the republicans agree to such a measure? Not at all. The People’s Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of capitulation to the bureaucracy and the officers. Such is the great lesson of the events in Spain, now being paid for with thousands of human lives.

Nearly 90 years since these lines were written, they expose the attempts of a Lula or an Iglesias to lull workers to sleep about the danger of world war and fascistic rule. Their pseudo-left pretensions are thoroughly false. They are by their very essence governments of capitulation to the banks, the state bureaucracy and the far-right officer corps.

Exposing the PT and Podemos requires building a political movement against the pseudo-left in the working class, based on a Marxist internationalist program for socialist revolution. This means building the ICFI internationally in the working class, including developing the Socialist Equality Group as the Brazilian section of the ICFI and launching the struggle to build a section of the ICFI in Spain.



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